

Planning in Practice

Westmeath County Council



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PRESENTATION OVERVIEW

Strategic Planning

Strategic Planning Context

Challenges and Opportunities for Westmeath

Planning in Practice

Athlone

- Building a Regional Growth Centre

Mullingar

- Key Town Focus

Castlepollard, Moate & Kinnegad

- Small Towns Focus



STRATEGIC PLANNING

- National Planning Framework - Regional Growth Centre
- Regional, Spatial & Economic Strategy Alignment
- County Development Plan Integration
- Local Plan Implementation
- Westmeath County Development Plan 2021-2027
 - Variation No.1: Mullingar Settlement Area Plan
 - Variation No.2: Athlone Joint Urban Settlement Area
- Strategic Investment Coordination





PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT ACT 2024

WESTMEATH COUNTY DEVELOPMENT PLAN



Moving to 10 year timeframe for CDPs



Longer Term Horizon



Stronger Strategic Focus



Aligns with Delivery Timeframes



5 year Review & Agility to Adapt



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ATHLONE

BUILDING A REGIONAL GROWTH CENTRE

Athlone functions in a similar manner, but at a different scale to the bigger cities.

- **National Planning Framework - Regional Growth Centre**
- **Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy** alignment
- County Development Plan integration
- Local Plan implementation
- Strategic investment coordination



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REGIONAL GROWTH PREPAREDNESS

Realising the potential of Athlone as a Regional Growth Centre evolved over time across many themes:

- **Strategic site assembly** over 15+ years
- Progressive public realm improvements
- Transport infrastructure upgrades
- Tourism & cultural investments
- Education sector expansion (TUS - 7,000 students)
- **Active travel** infrastructure (Greenway/Blueway)



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VISION TO PLANNING POLICY

Our planning documents have consistently articulated an ambitious vision for Athlone:

- "Vibrant, inclusive place to live, work, study and visit"
- "Driver of regional growth"
- "Sustainable, compact growth"
- "University town of choice"
- Site assembly began 2000s
- Viable development proposition
- Business case approach essential
- Proved concept for future projects



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SHARED VISION WITH ROSCOMMON

The future success of Athlone will require a collaborative approach to future development in areas such as:

- Cross-boundary collaboration
- **Joint Local Area Strategies** (in preparation)
- **Coordinated investment** strategies
- Unified approach to housing, retail, economic development
- Shared infrastructure planning
- Environment and Climate
- One town, two counties, **single vision**
- <https://athlonejointplan.ie/>



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INTEGRATED PLANNING

- Living City Initiative
- Vacancy & Dereliction
- Green City
- Built Heritage, Archaeology & Cultural Heritage
- Public Spaces & Environmental Amenities
- Safe, Adaptable, Appealing Town Environment





URBAN REGENERATION & DEVELOPMENT FUND 2018

- Plan officially launched November 2024



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Promote high quality distinctive Urban Design in Athlone as a driver for positive place based and people focused regeneration as a foundation for future investment decisions

URBAN DESIGN FRAMEWORK

Establishes a **blueprint for town regeneration**, integrating planning, architecture, urban design, placemaking, and tourism.

- Guides the **design and delivery** of regenerative development to enhance overall appeal of the Town
- Promotes high-quality **urban design**
- Opportunity Sites (brownfield)
- 'Pipeline Projects' - **transformative interventions**
- Public spaces and environmental amenities, alongside improved transport, cycling and pedestrian links
- Creating a safe, adaptable, and appealing town environment
- Guide decision making and influence investment



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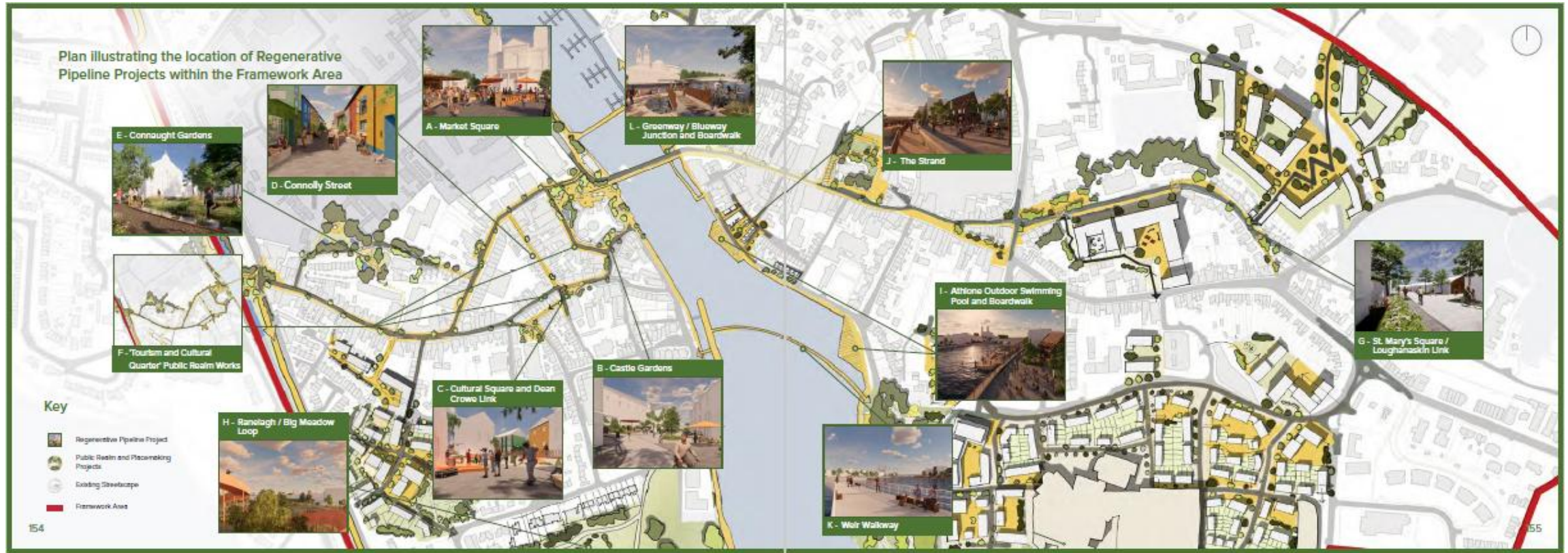
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URBAN DESIGN & REGENERATION FRAMEWORK





ATHLONE TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION & ENHANCEMENT

Urban Regeneration Development Fund 2020

- Planning – June 2021 (Part 8)
- Design Team Lead – McAdam Design
- Construction – John Craddock Ltd
- Official Opening – November 2024
- IPI Award 2025 – Highly Commended



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Before



After

ATHLONE TOWN CENTRE PUBLIC REALM IMPROVEMENTS

Sean Costello Street

- More Attractive Street
- Greater Vibrancy & Footfall
- Supports Businesses



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BUILDING BLOCKS

Pedestrianisation was simply a building block:

- Natural evolution of regeneration strategy
- Builds on previous public realm investments
- Supports **town centre vitality**
- Enhances **visitor experience**
- Strengthens economic position



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ATHLONE CASTLE

Just Transition Fund – Fáilte Ireland

Regenerative Tourism & Placemaking Scheme

- Commenced – April 2025
- Planning – September 2025 (Part 8)
- Design – Galmstrup Architects
- Construction – Q2 2026



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ATHLONE POOL AND BOARDWALK

Just Transition Fund Fáilte Ireland

Regenerative Tourism & Placemaking Scheme

- Commenced – August 2025
- Design Team Lead – Cooney Architects
- Planning – Q2 2026 (Part 8/Part 10)

Next Phase

- Funding
- Detailed Design, Procurement
- Construction



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ATHLONE

SMART INNOVATION & CO-WORKING HUB

MEITHEAL GATE

Just Transition Fund & Local and Regional Economic Strategies Support Scheme

- Partnership with TUS
- Phase 1 – Enabling Works ongoing
- Planning – September 2025
- Phase 2 – Planning – Q2 2026



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LOUGHANASKIN URBAN REGENERATION MASTERPLAN 2023

Urban Regeneration Development Fund 2018

- Design Team Lead – Turley
- 4.09 Hectare Prime Development Site
- Sustainable and Integrated New Urban Quarter

The purpose of the **Masterplan** is to enable **comprehensive regeneration** of Loughanaskin to become a **sustainable and integrated urban quarter**.

Combining bold architecture and pioneering landscape design, it will become a **thriving neighbourhood for business, culture, education and community**.



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In the pipeline...

MARKET PLACE ATHLONE



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INFRASTRUCTURAL SUPPORT

- Active Travel
- Greenways and Blueways
- Strategic Transport Infrastructure Projects
- Athlone Main Drainage
- Athlone Flood Alleviation Scheme
- Tourism & Cultural Investments
- Education Sector Expansion



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PEDESTRIAN AND CYCLEWAY BRIDGE

Transport Infrastructure Ireland

Westmeath National Roads Office

- Commenced – March 2012
- Design Team Lead – Seán Harrington Architects & Roughan O'Donovan Engineers
- Construction – Jons Civil Engineering Ltd
- Officially opened – 8 August 2023

500m section of cycleway links the Marina on the east bank of the Shannon with Athlone Castle on the west bank

104m long cycleway bridge located between the Radisson Hotel and the Luan Gallery



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ATHLONE BUS SERVICES



Minister Ryan launches Ireland's first all-electric town bus service in Athlone

Athlone project represents €10 million investment in the first completed project of the Government's Pathfinder Programme
20 January 2023



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ATHLONE MAIN DRAINAGE SCHEME



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ATHLONE FLOOD ALLEVIATION SCHEME



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MULLINGAR KEY TOWN



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CANAL AVENUE, MULLINGAR

REGENERATION MASTERPLAN 2023

Urban Regeneration Development Fund 2018

- Design Team Lead – Turley
- 2.56 Hectare Strategically Located Redevelopment Opportunity
- Sustainable, Resilient, Integrated Neighbourhood



The Masterplan will guide the **comprehensive regeneration and transformation** of the Canal Avenue area over the next **20 years** to facilitate a new highly **sustainable, resilient and integrated** neighbourhood.

A diverse range of **climate resilient environmental and public realm enhancements** will frame and enable **development opportunity sites** to act as a **catalyst for transformational growth** and maximise **connectivity** to, and increase the **amenity value** of, the **River Brosna and the Royal Canal**.



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MULLINGAR REGIONAL SPORTS COMPLEX

- Preliminary Design Team Lead – Henry J Jones
- Planning – October 2025 (Part 8)
- Extensive Stakeholder Engagement

Next Phase

- Large Scale Sport Infrastructure Fund (LSSIF)
- Detailed Design Team Procurement



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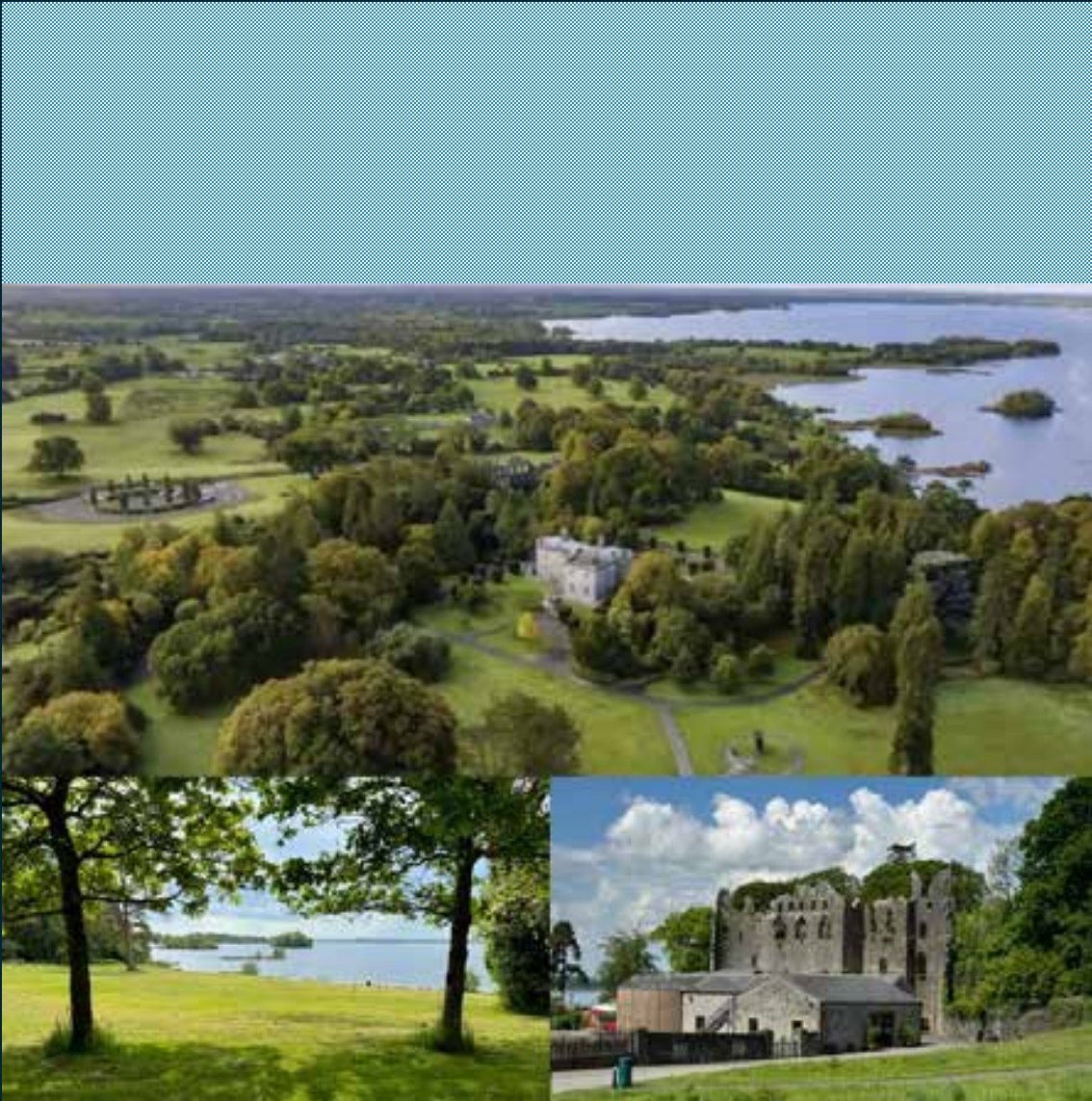
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BELVEDERE HOUSE & GARDENS

Just Transition Fund Fáilte Ireland

Regenerative Tourism and Placemaking Scheme

- Heritage, Conservation and Restore
- Economic Viability
- Sustainability & Biodiversity



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KINNEGAD COMMUNITY LIBRARY & EDUCATION CENTRE TOWN PARK & PLAYGROUND

Rural Regeneration Development Fund

- Commenced – July 2020
- Design Team Lead – Cooney Architects
- Planning – December 2020 (Part 8)
- Construction – Coolsivna Construction
- Park – In-house design and construction
- Library & Park Opened – October 2025



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CASTLEPOLLARD MARKET HOUSE & PUBLIC REALM TOWN PARK & PLAYGROUND

Rural Regeneration Development Fund

- Design Team Lead – Cooney Architects
- Planning – April 2022 (Part 8)
- Town Park Opened – July 2025



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MOATE TOWN CENTRE FIRST PLAN



Photo view of Main Street



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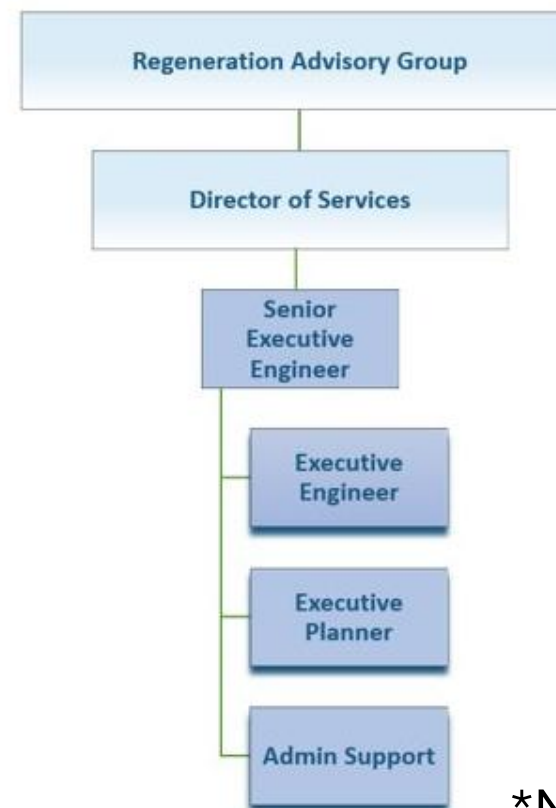
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DELIVERY TEAM

FROM SMALL BEGINNINGS



*November 2023



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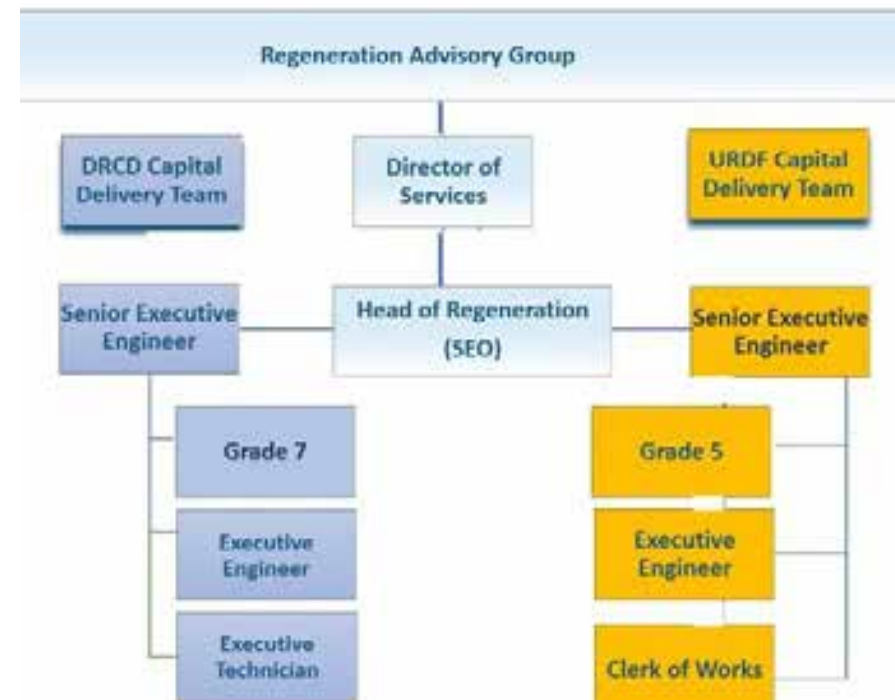
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DELIVERY TEAM

TO A DEDICATED TEAM, DELIVERING
PROJECTS ACROSS THE COUNTY



*November 2025



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COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

Elected Members role crucial to any project's success:

- Early and continuous engagement
- Presenting evidence-based proposals
- Alignment with policy objectives
- Building consensus through collaboration
- Present **multiple viable options**
- Comprehensive analysis of each option
- **Respect democratic mandate**
- Enable informed Councillor decision-making
- **Build ownership** through participation



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COLLABORATIVE LEARNINGS

Elected Members role crucial to the project's success:

- Start **engagement early** and maintain throughout
- **Visualisations** are powerful communication tools
- Be **transparent** about constraints and trade-offs
- Celebrate quick wins while maintaining long-term vision
- Build **relationships**, not just consensus



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KEY TAKEAWAYS

Act now and be prepared:

- Vision must predate funding
- Build political support through **partnership**
- **Evidence based** planning builds confidence
- Deliver visible wins while maintaining focus
- Integrate all planning elements
- **Collaborate** across boundaries
- Commercial **viability** ensures sustainability



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